



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

Ohio man pleads guilty to money laundering, illegally transferring funds to Iran *Used “Hawala” scheme and foreign bank accounts to illegally move funds to Iran*

TOLEDO, Ohio — A Fostoria, Ohio, physician pleaded guilty here yesterday to 36 counts of money laundering and illegally transferring funds to Iran. This guilty plea was announced by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Special Agent-in-Charge Brian M. Moskowitz; and Vincent C. Williams, Special Agent-in-Charge for the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigative Division (IRS-CI) in Cleveland.

Mohammad Anvari-Hamedani, 72, is a naturalized U.S citizen originally from Iran. In April 2002, ICE and the IRS executed a search warrant at his residence where the seized documentary evidence revealed strong support for the current Iranian fundamentalist regime and the late Ayatollah Komeini. Other seized documents revealed bank accounts in the U.S., Great Britain, the United Arab Emirates and Singapore which were used to illegally transfer about \$4 million to Iran, which violated the U.S. embargo. Further investigation by ICE also uncovered that Anvari-Hamedani used a “hawala” scheme to transfer \$169,000 to Iran.

“Hawalas” are a form of alternative money-transmitting business, common in many Middle Eastern and African countries, through which funds can be transferred between parties based on ties of kinship and individual trust. There is not an immediate physical or electronic transfer of funds. Money changers, aka “hawaladars,” physically receive cash or funds in one country. Correspondent hawaladars in another country dispense an identical amount (minus any fees or commissions) to a recipient or a designated recipient bank account. These arrangements could be exploited by terrorist groups or other criminal organizations to transfer large sums of money across international borders undetected.

Anvari-Hamedani pleaded guilty to 21 counts of illegal money transfers to Iran. Pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), President William J. Clinton signed Executive Orders prohibiting any new investments in Iran by a U.S. person. Violating IEEPA carries a potential penalty of a \$250,000 fine, 10 years imprisonment, or both.

Anvari-Hamedani's guilty plea also includes the following charges:

- Eight counts of money laundering. The charges allege that the defendant's exporting funds from the United States to Iran violates the IEEPA. The money-laundering charges each carry a potential penalty of a \$500,000 fine, 20 years' imprisonment, or both.
- Four counts of filing false tax returns by failing to disclose Anvari-Hamedani's foreign accounts and foreign interest income. These charges carry a potential penalty of a \$250,000 fine, three years' imprisonment, or both.
- Three counts of failing to file Foreign Bank Account Reports. These charges carry a potential penalty of a \$250,000 fine, five years' imprisonment, or both.
- ICE will seize forfeited assets totaling \$650,000 which will be deposited into the Treasury Forfeiture Fund.

"This is a serious violation of U.S. export laws, and those who ignore American economic sanctions against countries such as Iran will be prosecuted," said ICE Special Agent-in-Charge Brian Moskowitz. "ICE will continue to use its expertise and authority to 'follow the money' whether it is here in the United States or around the world – as we work with our partners to bring these individuals to justice." Moskowitz heads the ICE Office of Investigations in Detroit which includes the states of Michigan and Ohio.

IRS-CI Special Agent-in-Charge Williams stated, "When an individual launders money, conceals their ownership in foreign bank accounts from the IRS, and does not report over \$750,000 in interest income generated by those hidden accounts, it becomes easy to see why IRS-CI calls money laundering tax evasion in progress. IRS-CI has the financial investigators and expertise that are critical to locating the money and prosecuting individuals that commit financial crimes both in this country and abroad. We are proud to be part of the team that brought this to justice."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas A. Karol, U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Ohio, Western Division prosecuted the case.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.